

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN CHRIS CARNEY (D-PA)

***SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT INVESTIGATIONS & OVERSIGHT
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY***

“Furthering the Mission or Having Fun: Lax Travel Policies Cost DHS Millions”

February 4, 2010

Today, we will examine the DHS Office of Inspector General’s audit of the amount of taxpayer dollars the Department of Homeland Security spent on conferences, retreats, and other offsite activities, in addition, we will examine the lack of internal controls, governing policies, oversight, and reporting of conference planning and spending practices which prevent the Department from being transparent and accountable to both Congress and the general public.

During fiscal years 2005 to 2007, the Department reportedly spent approximately \$110 million on conference-related activities, spending approximately \$60 million in direct costs and an additional \$50 million identified as salary expenses for employees attending the conference.

I will be extremely interested in hearing today whether conference spending and attendance at these events were a prudent use of tax payer dollars. But I would also like to stress that I and all members of this subcommittee understand the importance of government travel including the jobs that are supported by this travel. As a Representative from Pennsylvania, I know how important travel and tourism is to our recovering economy, but we need to insure that the Department can accurately account for its travel spending.

According to the IG report entitled “*DHS Conference Spending Practices and Oversight*” DHS officials were unable to produce precise consistent numbers on conference spending, often information was not maintained in a manner to facilitate proper examination, tracking of actual conference costs, or identification of a sponsoring entity. As a result, most responses received from the components contained missing data and had discrepancies.

Most alarmingly according to the IG report a “DHS official said there is no reason to track conference expenditures because there are no spending restrictions.”

The IG found that “DHS components are planning and sponsoring conferences without any consistent approval or tracking processes. When combined with inconsistent conference cost and attendance numbers, DHS needs to develop better management controls to ensure that conferences are funded and attended for only mission-critical purposes and that costs are minimized to the greatest extent possible.

The Department needs clear and consistent conference planning and guidance.

The Department must define terms such as conference, retreats, training and outside activities, in a uniform matter so that all of its organizational elements are on the same page.

Limited Department-wide procedures exist for determining or minimizing the number of employees attending conferences or for standards justifying attendance. The only “test” that appears to be in place for determining the necessity of travel is whether funding is available. This must be fixed.

According to the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Department has one mission: to secure the nation from the many threats we face. Fulfilling this mission requires the Department to participate in many off-site activities throughout the country and the world. Notwithstanding this fact, the Department must exercise oversight, accountability and transparency regarding the amount of tax payer money it spends on conference-related activities.